



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

MONTANA WOLF PROGRAM WEEKLY REPORT

To: Interested Parties

From: FWP Wolf Program Coordinator, Carolyn Sime (406-461-0587)

Subject: Wolf Program Activities and Related Information, May 16 – May 22 2009

Contributors to the Montana Wolf Weekly are Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), Universities, USDA Wildlife Services (WS), the National Park Service (NPS; Glacier NP; Yellowstone National Park will be reported in the Wyoming Wolf Weekly), US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the Blackfeet Nation.

Highlighted activities relate to: monitoring, wolf – livestock interactions, outreach and education, research, law enforcement, and other miscellaneous topics of public interest. The Weekly Report will be available on each Monday, covering the previous week. It and other wolf program information (including the 2008 annual report) can be found at: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Wolf Monitoring Activities

FWP wolf staff are getting field work underway now that the weather has improved. Lingering snow pack in some places has delayed access and fieldwork. Volunteers in northwest Montana start this week. Laudon expects to begin trapping in Glacier National Park by the end of the week. Lance has been scouting in the Big Hole. Bradley expects to be working in the Phillipsburg area.

FWP encourages hunters, landowners, and other outdoor enthusiasts to report wolves through the online reporting button or to send in one of the pre-printed postcards available at all FWP offices, many US Forest Service offices, and license providers throughout the state. Information provided by the public helps FWP more accurately monitor wolf numbers and distribution in Montana.

Flights: Bradley flew in western Montana on 5/1, 5/2, 5/15, and 5/21. Laudon flew in northwest Montana on 5/22.

Wolf - Livestock Activities

On 5/16, WS killed one wolf from the Grasshopper pack. Efforts to remove the remaining two are ongoing. After several incidents of confirmed livestock damage this year and two previous incremental lethal control removals, FWP had authorized WS to remove the remaining 3 members of this pack.

On 5/16, WS caught and collared a 2 year-old gray male wolf north of Avon. Trapping was initiated in the area after a calf was confirmed killed on private land on March 19th. Traps were pulled. This wolf is believed to be one of a new pair using the area. No more conflicts have been reported.

On 5/18, near the Cameron area on private land, WS investigated two (300 pound) calves that had bite marks to the flank area. They were confirmed as being caused by wolves. Both calves are expected to survive. FWP did not initiate any lethal control, but the owners are aware that state law allows non-injurious hazing / harassing when wolves are too close to livestock and also allows the wolf / wolves to be killed if seen actively attacking, killing, or threatening to kill livestock.

On 5/19, WS confirmed 2 wolves in the Miner Lakes pack killed a yearling cow west of the Jackson area (south end of the Big Hole Valley). Previous livestock losses have been confirmed. FWP had already authorized removal of 3 wolves from this pack and a permit was issued to the landowner on 5/18. One wolf was killed on 5/15. After investigating the dead cow on 5/19, WS killed two wolves on the same ranch near cattle and neither was collared. One of the wolves was a male. The other was a female and she was lactating. However, the known primary breeding female which started this pack is collared. The collared breeder was not on the ranch at the time and the signal was heard near the denning area, which is about two miles from the ranch. A second wet female would suggest the possibility of a second litter of pups or that it was a "helper." Subsequent field monitoring since the 19th and ongoing wolf activity on and near the same ranch confirmed that the pack is still in the area and pups are surviving. On 5/20, a ranch employee on the same ranch reported to WS and FWP shooting and possibly injuring a wolf harassing yearling cattle. Two wolves were seen in cattle. The next day, FWP and WS investigated the incident and surveyed the area but did not locate an injured or dead wolf and no injured or dead livestock were found. The ranch has had previous depredations and lethal control work in the past week in this same location. Lethal control efforts are done and the permit was canceled, but WS and FWP will continue to closely monitor the pack and stay in close communication with the landowner regarding ongoing wolf activity on the ranch.

On 5/20, the Phillipsburg area game warden received a call from a livestock owner who shot at and missed 5 wolves in a pasture that were approaching his cattle. The incident occurred in the upper Willow Creek drainage and could have been the Ram Mountain pack. Bradley expects to be working in the area next week.

On 5/22, WS investigated a dead yearling cow on private land near Grant in SWMT. It was unconfirmed and was not caused by a wolf.

On 5/22 near White Sulphur Springs, WS investigated a report of 2 cows missing calves and a possible scat with calf hair. The scat was from a coyote and no confirmed livestock losses occurred.

Outreach and Education Activities

On 5/15 Bradley and Peter Brown (FWP volunteer and Blackfoot range rider) met with the BCCA (Blackfoot Community Conservation Area) workgroup to talk about wolf activity in the valley and goals for trying to reduce wolf predation risk on livestock in the valley this summer. About 25 people attended.

On 5/16, Bradley gave a wolf presentation to a Girl Scout troop as part of a Wilderness Awareness Day at Camp Menard in the Ninemile Valley. About 20 people attended.

On 5/19, Bradley gave two wolf presentations to groups of sixth graders at the Mineral County outdoor school in Haugan. About 20 students attended.

On 5/19, Lance gave an update on delisting and wolf hunting quotas at the Butte Skyline Sportsman meeting. About 20 people attended.

Research Activities

Nothing to report.

Law Enforcement and Related Activities

A few incidents of private citizens shooting at wolves (as noted above) were investigated. No wolves were killed.

Other

On 5/22, Steuber, Glazier, Sime, Bangs, and a livestock owner north of Helena had a conference call to discuss genetics analysis results of two wolves from the Mitchell Mountain pack (which were killed to address wolf livestock conflicts). The livestock owner was concerned that there could be wolf hybrid ancestry. Initial genetic results were suspect. Follow up testing was completed independently at the USFWS Forensics Lab and UCLA. Results from both labs confirmed that the samples were from wild wolves consistent with the northern Rocky Mountain population and both results had a high degree of certainty. No evidence of hybridization was found. In discussing test results with all three geneticists, it became apparent how important it is to have an adequate reference collection with a high number of samples (400-500 best) from throughout the northern Rockies (not just a single area) in order for results to be reliable. An additional consideration is that MT contains portions of all three subpopulations / recovery areas. FWP and WS affirm their respective commitments to genetic sampling for purposes of research and while implementing the multi-party MOU to protect genetic diversity and ensure genetic connectivity in the northern Rockies region. FWP and WS also affirm their respective commitments to address wolf-livestock conflicts, whether an escaped hybrid or wild wolf.

The FWP Wolf Program is recruiting to fill a seasonal field conservation technician position. The job is based in Missoula and will be filled on or not long after July 1. Application materials include a state application, supplemental questions, and reference checks. The closing date is June 15, 2009. Apply online, see: <http://fwp.mt.gov/doingBusiness/employment/currentOpenings.aspx>

NEW -- Delisting Update:

On May 4, gray wolves in Montana were delisted. Conservation and management are guided by Montana laws, administrative rules (ARM 12.9.1301 – 12.9.1305), and the state's federally-approved plan. Wolves in Montana were automatically reclassified to a "species in need of management" statewide on May 4. The gray wolf is protected statewide, though individual wolves may be hazed, harassed, or killed if seen actively attacking, killing, or threatening to kill livestock. Incidents must be reported and each will be investigated. Wolves may also be killed to protect human life. See the FWP wolf web page for a Fact Sheet and answers to frequently asked questions about delisting. The FWP wolf web page also has information about state law and regulations and what livestock owners can do to protect livestock. See: <http://fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf/default.html>.

Montana 2009 Wolf Hunting Season: FWP and the FWP Commission continue efforts to develop and prepare for a potential 2009 season. The season structure previously adopted by the FWP Commission is still in place for a potential fall 2009 season. But FWP and the FWP Commission must still establish

a quota (the total number of wolves that could be taken by hunters) for 2009. FWP and the Commission still intend to proceed cautiously and conservatively.

At the FWP Commission meeting on 5/14, FWP proposed a range of statewide and individual Wolf Management Unit tentative quotas for Commission consideration and public comment. FWP proposed a range of no hunting (quota of zero) to 207 total wolves and a North Fork Flathead Subunit subquota of 2 wolves. All options presented are predicted to maintain or increase the wolf population of about 500 wolves (the 2008 estimate) and would not risk a population decline to fewer than 15 breeding pairs statewide based on a harvest simulation modeling exercise and Montana wolf population data from 2007/2008. Other conservation considerations incorporated into the proposal and the season structure previously adopted by the commission, harvest reporting requirements, and “safety net” mechanisms to assure that implementation of a conservative hunting season would not jeopardize the population were also discussed.

The FWP Commission discussed the proposal and affirmed their commitment to implement fair chase hunting as a wildlife management tool for wolves in a professional manner. The Commission also affirmed their commitment to maintain a healthy recovered wolf population. The public was also provided an opportunity to comment. After public comment, the Commission approved a range of statewide and individual Wolf Management Unit quotas of 26, 75, and 165 for further public comment.

Public comment will be accepted through 5pm June 19. FWP expects to make a final quota recommendation for FWP Commission consideration and final action on July 9. To comment electronically, follow this link: <http://fwp.mt.gov/hunting/default.html>. Scroll down under Public Comment for the “Proposed 2009 Wolf Quotas and Subquota” bullet and click on the link – then scroll down the Interested Person’s letter for the wolf section and link at the bottom of the letter.

Written comment will also be accepted via postal mail and must be received by 5pm June 19: Drop comments off in person or mail to: FWP, Wildlife Division, Wolf Quota Comments, PO Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620. Written letters can be submitted in their original format electronically at the link above.

Background: Previously, the Commission adopted a regulatory framework and season structure for public harvest (e.g. management units, season dates, and other general regulations) of wolves in February 2008. For a potential fall 2008 season, FWP proposed a conservative quota of 75 wolves that was predicted to maintain or increase the population compared to 2007 levels. The federal court injunction precluded consideration or adoption of a final quota and a 2008 hunting season.

Montana Livestock Loss Reduction & Mitigation Board:

Nothing to report. The program coordinator can be reached at 444-5609.

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To learn more about Montana's wolf population, the Montana program and to help FWP monitor wolves by reporting wolf sign, visit FWP at: www.fwp.mt.gov/wildthings/wolf.

To anonymously report a dead or injured wolf or suspected illegal activity, call: 1-800-TIP-MONT.

To request an investigation of injured or dead livestock, call USDA Wildlife Services directly in western Montana / Helena area at 458-0106 or in eastern Montana at the statewide office: 657-6464. Or, call your nearest FWP representative to have your call referred to Wildlife Services.

If you have a confirmed or probable livestock loss due to wolves, USDA Wildlife Services will supply you with a copy of the Loss Reimbursement Application form. For more information, see <http://liv.mt.gov/liv/LM/index.asp>. Or, contact the Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Program Coordinator George Edwards at the Montana Department of Livestock at 444-5609.

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